

ERS analyzes and monitors such areas as:

- Environmental issues.
- Nutrition education and food assistance, food safety regulation, determinants of consumer demand for quality and safety, and food marketing trends and developments.
- National and international commodity markets and production agriculture.
- The economic well-being of the rural economy, the financial performance of the farm sector, and the implications of changing farm credit and financial market structures.

ERS information is made available to the public through research publications, situation and outlook reports, e-mail and the World Wide Web, newspapers, magazines, radio, and frequent participation of ERS staff at public forums. ERS publishes several periodicals, including *Agricultural Outlook*, *FoodReview*, and *Rural America*.

The agency's products are available through a variety of formats. Printed reports can be ordered through the ERS-NASS sales desk at 1-800-999-6779. Studies, data bases, issue briefs, and other types of information are available on the ERS web site at www.econ.ag.gov and the ERS AutoFax system at 202-694-5700.

National Agricultural Statistics Service

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), "*The Fact Finders for U.S. Agriculture*," is the official data collection arm of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The only way to "tell the story" of the phenomenal success of American agriculture is by having data available that measure productivity. Having accurate, timely information available is not only important to tell the success story of American agriculture, but it is vital to support the efficient handling of commodities in today's global market.

The NASS mission is to serve the basic agricultural and rural data needs of the people of the United States, those working in agriculture, and those living in rural communities by objectively providing important, usable, and accurate statistical information and services needed to make informed decisions.

The NASS program has successfully met many challenges over the last 138 years to provide data to meet demands from a multitude of data users. These data are geared toward producers to help them plan planting, feeding, breeding, and marketing programs. Other major uses of these statistical data include the following:

- Timely, accurate data are essential in establishing and maintaining a market place where price is determined by real facts rather than speculation and rumors.
- Sound data are needed for resolving environmental issues, rather than worst case scenarios.
- Exporters of American farm products rely on accurate information.
- Our transportation-storage industry relies on the statistics in its efforts to move agricultural products to market.
- Suppliers use the data to allocate the necessary inputs farmers need to grow their crops or raise livestock.

- Government policymakers rely on accurate data in their efforts to address natural disasters, crop insurance, and depressed farm prices.
- Other USDA agencies use the statistical data in accomplishing important programs for the Department, whether it be carrying out agricultural policy concerning farm program legislation, commodity programs, agricultural research, and rural development.

NASS headquarters is located in Washington, DC, and 45 State Statistical Offices cover more than 120 crops and 45 livestock items annually in the 50 States. Current and historical information is published in over 400 reports, which feature:

- Crop acreage, yield, production, and grain stocks;
- Livestock, dairy, and poultry production and prospects;
- Chemical use in agriculture, including post-harvest applications on selected crops;
- Labor use and wage rates;
- Farms and land in farms; and
- Prices, costs, and returns.

An abundance of agricultural information is available to data users through NASS programs. In addition to the information above, estimates on more specialized commodities, including hop stocks, mink, cherries, cranberries, hazelnuts, lentils, and peppermint oil are also available. The new nursery, equine, and aquaculture surveys have been enthusiastically endorsed by these three important industries. Most statistics are based on information gathered from producers surveyed through personal and telephone or face-to-face interviews or through mailed questionnaires. Other statistical reports are based on surveys of grain elevators, hatcheries, and other agribusinesses, as well as on administrative data such as livestock slaughter records.

Data collected from these varied sources are summarized by the NASS State offices and are sent to the agency's Agricultural Statistics Board in Washington, DC, whose members determine and issue State and national official reports.

Census of Agriculture

In 1997, NASS' statistics program was enhanced through the addition of the every 5-year census of agriculture, previously administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Census Bureau. This has broadened the scope of agricultural statistics available through the agency. Data from the 1997 Census of Agriculture were released electronically several months ahead of the normal release schedule on February 1 of 1999, and are now available in print, on CD-ROM, and on the Internet. In addition, following the census of agriculture release, NASS conducts special studies for aquaculture, horticulture, and irrigation. Every 10 years following the census of agriculture, NASS conducts the agricultural economics and land ownership survey which is the only source of data on agricultural land ownership, financing, and inputs by farm operators and landlords for each State.

The census is a complete accounting of U.S. agricultural production and the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the Nation. The 1997 Census of Agriculture results include data on land use and ownership, operator characteristics, crops, machinery and equipment, livestock, fertilizer, poultry, chemicals, market value of products, energy expenditures, irrigated land, production expenses, type of organization, farm programs, and corporate structure.

The NASS *Quick Facts* brochure published from the 1997 Census of Agriculture data "tells the story" of American agriculture at a glance.

How To Get More Information

All NASS reports are released at scheduled times, and the information is offered to the public in a variety of formats. The NASS table shows some methods by which NASS data can be accessed.